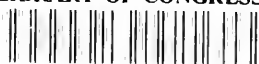


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In Memoriam.

IN MEMORY
—OF—
MRS. JAS. K. POLK,
ASLEEP IN JESUS.

REACHED home after a pilgrimage of eighty and eight years, Mrs. SARAH CHILDRESS POLK. Thus one of earth's noblest spirits, one of God's dear children passes out of the shadows of time into the light of eternity. The long journey ends in the rest that remaineth to the people of God.

In the early morning of August 14, 1891, at Polk Place, Nashville, Tennessee, she quietly fell asleep in Jesus, in the sure hope of a blessed resurrection.

Mrs. Polk, the daughter of Joel and Elizabeth Childress, was born near Murfreesboro, Tennessee, September, 4, 1803. Being a child of bright promise, she received the best educational advantages afforded by that time. At the age of fifteen years, she was sent to the Moravian Seminary at Salem, North Carolina, making the long journey on horseback. There was laid the foundation of that elegant culture which fitted her for the high places she was to occupy.

Returning to her home, she met James Knox Polk, then a clerk of the State Legislature, which sat in Murfreesboro. Fascinated by her beauty, her accomplishments, and her lovely disposition, he sought her hand in marriage. On the first day of January, 1824,

they were married, he being then a member of the Legislature. They went to his home at Columbia, Tennessee, to live. It was a union of heart and life, full of strength and blessing to both, growing in tenderness and devotion for twenty-five years, when death dissolved it, and brought to her the one great sorrow, and gave to her the one most precious memory of her life. It was a marriage founded not only in love, but in the highest respect, and congenial tastes.

In 1825, Mr. Polk was elected to Congress, and with him she spent many winters in Washington; by her quick sympathy, ready tact, and graceful manners, helping forward the work of the rising statesman. When he became Governor of Tennessee in 1839, she became a leader of social life in Nashville. In 1845, she returned to Washington, after his election as President of the United States, to preside over the social life of the White House.

There she displayed those qualities of head and heart which won for her the love and admiration of all parties and classes. With rare grace and skill did she fulfill the arduous duties of her high place. Gentle, dignified, courteous, yet easy, approachable, bright, she was esteemed equally by the high and the lowly. Well informed, thoughtful, vivacious, her conversation had a charm for all, while she kept strictly within the sphere of a true and noble womanhood. In her domestic life she did not neglect the little duties of the household, while she kept in sympathy with her husband's deeper cares and questions. Firm in her convictions of duty, she banished dancing from the President's mansion, and wine from the

table, except at the State dinners; but it was done so kindly and in so gracious a way that none were offended. She was a lady "to the manner born."

After Mr. Polk's term of office expired, they came to Nashville to occupy the beautiful Polk Place, looking forward to many years of happy companionship, free from the cares and anxieties of public life, hoping to grow old together in their own home, and among loving, faithful friends. But in a few months the beloved husband was stricken down in his prime, and she was left to linger for more than forty-two years, before she should fill up the measure of her days.

Through all these slow-revolving years, she has lived faithful, devoted to the memory of her dead. While the heart yearned often for "the touch of a vanished hand, and the sound of a voice that was still," she yet took up cheerfully the duties of life, gave herself with earnest purpose to making others happy. She was, of course, a center of social attention in the city of her home, and with the same gracious tact and unfailing kindness, she made her circle bright. The lofty and the lowly came from far and near to pay respect, and went away feeling the better for her genial welcome.

Having no children of her own, she took a little niece, only two years old, and brought her up with tender, motherly care. From her she received the dutiful and loving devotion of a daughter; and her age was gladdened by the voices of children, and children's children, gathering about this daughter and her child.

Mrs. Polk's religious life was consistent, simple,

earnest. In 1833, she united with the Presbyterian Church at Columbia, Tennessee. When she came to Nashville, she joined the First Presbyterian Church, then under the charge of Rev. Dr. John T. Edgar. Faithfully she fulfilled her duties as a member of the Church for many years. When age and growing infirmities of body prevented her attendance on the services of the house of God, her heart was with the worshipers, and with yearning she looked out from her window toward the sanctuary.

She loved the Bible, and read it constantly for the nourishment of her soul. She marked its truths and meditated on them. She was a devout woman. Her religion was to her a great ever-present reality.

When the summons came to her after all the years of waiting, it was sudden. On Wednesday evening, after a pleasant drive, she arose from the midst of her family, to retire to her room. At her door she was stricken and fell. All that love and skill could do was done, but the earthly house of this tabernacle was dissolving. All day Thursday she lay quietly waiting. Before the dawn of Friday, intense pain gave warning that the end was near. But pain was soon gone. As she turned to sleep a little, she was told by her daughter that it would be that sleep for which she had so long waited. She was somewhat surprised, but said that she was ready and willing. She called for her loved ones, and with almost rapture spoke of God's mercy in Christ, and of her hope so soon to be realized. Then quoting part of the hymn

I would not live away, I ask not to stay,

Where storm after storm rises dark o'er the way,

She said that it did not apply to her, for her life had

never known but one great sorrow, the death of her dear husband. Then repeating another verse with joyful approval,

Who, who would live always away from his God,
Away from yon heaven that blissful abode?

she laid her hands in blessing on her daughter's head, and with benedictions on her dear ones about her, she gently gave up the ghost, and was gathered unto her people. Her death was according to her desire, in answer to her prayers, free from struggle, quietly going to sleep. Her work was done; her testimony was finished and sealed.

While the body lay awaiting burial, multitudes testified in various forms their respect, and their sense of loss.

On Sabbath morning, August 16, at nine o'clock, the funeral service was held at Polk Place. An immense crowd of all classes and conditions were present. All were her friends. The service was conducted by Rev. J. H. McNeilly, pastor of Glen Leven Church, Dr. Witherspoon, Mrs. Polk's pastor, being absent on account of his health, in a distant State. Rev. Dr. Robert Price, of the South western Presbyterian University, and Rev. Dr. S. A. Steel, pastor of McKendree Methodist Church, assisted in the service. President Polk, who was a member of the Methodist Church, was buried from McKendree. The sermon was as follows:

Zech. xiv. 7: "At evening time it shall be light."

The most beautiful season of the long summer days in high latitudes, is the lingering twilight. After the heat and the brightness have passed away, the air grows cool and still, the light is softened, headland

and mountain stand clear and far, distinct in every outline, in the rosy glow of evening. The darkness steals on gently and unaware. After awhile the quiet stars one by one gleam in the tender skies, and the very spirit of peace broods over the world. Our heavenly Father gives to some of His dear children, after a long bright day of duty, the lengthened twilight of calm waiting for the coming of the night. Then the headlands of their life, which marked the path of God's leading, stand "far withdrawn in tenderest purple of distance," their summits touched with the golden glow of infinite love. And in the bending heavens above, one by one come out all the stars of promise, like "torches that wave their welcome to our eternal home." This dear daughter of God has been long waiting in the beautiful twilight of a long day. She has been watching the deepening of earth's shadows, and the brightening of the stars of eternal hope. Now the body lies in the darkness of death; the spirit rejoices in "the light that never was on sea nor shore," the soft, clear light of her Father's face, His love made the evening light about her, and now it brightens all eternity for her.

In the quietness of an assured trust, she "laid her down in peace and slept, for God only made her dwell in safety." Her flesh rests in hope; her spirit dwells with God. He hath "given his beloved sleep."

Mrs. Sarah Childress Polk, one of the most honored and best beloved of the women of our land, was long a familiar figure in the social life of our city. Born in Rutherford County, Tennessee, September 4, 1803. After a careful education, she was married, at the age of twenty years, to James K. Polk, who became the

eleventh President of the United States. With rare grace and tact she filled the places to which Providence called her, everywhere winning respect and love. In the high places of the land, as in the gentle charities of domestic life, she was a helpmeet for her husband, and "his heart did safely trust in her." When he retired from office, worn with the cares of State, he looked to her loving companionship to rest his weariness and refresh his coming years. But suddenly God took him, and thenceforth for more than forty years she walked the path of earth's pilgrimage alone.

The one great sorrow that shadowed all her life was not allowed to darken other lives. Taking up her duties, she set herself to larger ministries of love and kindness. She sought the greatness of being servant of all. Having no child of her own, her motherly heart took a near relative, a little girl, as a daughter. On her she lavished all the wealth of generous love; and she was rewarded in years of genial companionship and filial devotion.

She has gone in and out before this community for more than a generation. She has been loved and honored by old and young, rich and poor, for her noble character, and for her deeds of kindness. It is needless for me to rehearse in this presence the story of a life so well and widely known.

But when death comes to close the evening of life, the most important questions are: What was the motive and meaning of that life? What was the ground of its hope for the everlasting future? What was the light that made its evening time bright? Did that light penetrate beyond the falling night?

The foundation of her hope was Jesus Christ and Him crucified. His spirit was the inspiration of all her activity. She walked by faith, as seeing him who is invisible. Fifty-eight years ago, she confessed her Saviour, uniting with the Presbyterian Church. In all her after years, in every position, she tried to walk worthy of her calling, and honor God. As the head of the social life of the nation, she felt that "promotion cometh neither from the East, nor from the West, nor from the South, but God is the judge." Therefore, humbly and reverently, every day she sought His guidance and strength. Always before going to receive the great ones of earth, she knelt in prayer to the Lord of the whole earth.

In her home life, her gentleness, charity, and sincerity commended her religion to those who knew her best. Only her own household knew the depth and reality of her religious life. In the last hour, when she knew that the Master had come and called for her, she was ready and willing to go; and she spent her dying breath in telling the sweet wonders of a Saviour's love, in praising God's goodness, and in invoking His blessings on her loved ones. With bright anticipations of the glory soon to be revealed, she could utter with only tremulous tones the words of a favorite hymn:

Who would live away, away from his God,
Away from yon heaven, that blissful abode,
Where the rivers of pleasure roll o'er the bright plains,
And the noontide of glory eternally reigns?

And the dying note of earth's last song was the first note of heaven's high and never ending praise.

Surely the evening time was light to her. Jesus

Christ, who had been her portion and her stay so long, did not fail her at the last. As she passed through the valley and the shadow of death, she feared no evil, for He was with her. His rod and staff did comfort her. Her prayer for His presence was answered.

Abide with me. Fast falls the eventide.
The darkness deepens. Lord, with me abide.
When other helpers fail, and comforts flee,
Help of the helpless, oh, abide with me.

Swift to its close ebbs out life's little day;
Earth's joys grow dim, its glories pass away;
Change and decay in all around I see:
Oh, Thou, who changeth not, abide with me.

Hold Thou Thy cross before my closing eyes;
Shine through the gloom, and point me to the skies.
Heaven's morning breaks, and earth's vain shadows flee.
In life, in death, Oh, Lord, abide with me.

It was the light of her Saviour's face that made the evening light and filled the darkness with bright shining.

The character and the works which her life showed were the result of Christ's training and disciplining of her.

Life's evening time shows its ripened, mellow fruit of character. For years Mrs. Polk lived among us an example of what grace can do for a spirit originally of a noble mould. Her Bible was her constant companion, and it is marked throughout in the passages on which her soul fed and was satisfied. A little book of devotion, "Morning and Night Watches," was read over and over again, and its pages are marked throughout. From a glance at her favorite scriptures, and the special places marked in her

book of devotion, one can form an idea of her spiritual character and disposition.

One is impressed with her thorough womanliness. She recognized the sphere in which God had placed her—the social sphere of which a true woman is the heart. With no vague ambitions for some different place, she did what she could to make life pure and sweet. While she was a woman of strong mind and of broad culture, yet these were used to minister help, and comfort and blessing in the domain of home. She won friends by showing herself friendly.

Affections were as thoughts to her,
The measures of her hours.

She was thoroughly unselfish, never seeking her own things. Even to the last she thought of others' comfort before her own. She was ready to make sacrifices for the benefit of her loved ones. Her age was not made unlovely by harsh exactions of duty from those about her. Old as she was her heart remained young, and she rejoiced in the fresh bright life of the young people. With rare womanly dignity and sense of decorum, she yet was not stiff and haughty. Entering into the life of her friends with keen zest, interested in the world and its on-goings, seeing and enjoying its beauty, she yet lived above it, and was not snared by its allurements.

Hers was a gentle, modest nature. With proper self-reliance, when occasion called for it, she was not self-assertive. Firm in her devotion to duty, she yet was mild and patient with those who were not equal to her standard. Her humility was one of her most beautiful traits. She thought not more highly of herself than she ought to think. She did not pre-

sume on her high station to demand more than her due.

She was charitable, not only in helping the needy, but in thinking no evil, in speaking kindly, in judging without bitterness. The poor were her friends; the lowly found in her a sister.

In her relations to God, she showed the deeper traits of her religious life and experience.

She trusted Him absolutely. His word was the end of controversy with her. In all the varying scenes of her life, she believed His promise, and she was confident that He could fulfill it.

This gave her cheerful confidence as to the future. She "knew Whom she had believed and was persuaded that He is able to keep that which she had committed to Him against that day." She put all things for time and eternity into the hands of her Saviour, and she left all with Him. With joyful hope she looked forward. This hopefulness and brightness of disposition doubtless prolonged her days. Even if it were dark about her, she saw the sunshine on the hills beyond, and she knew that after a bit her path would take her up to the hills, nearer to God, where she could look back and forward and see the goodness of her Father in all His leading. Her faith gave her activity in service. She stood up for the Master and tried to obey His commandments. She was not satisfied merely with hoping in His promise. Life's duties were done because she knew that her labor was not in vain in the Lord. Faith without works is dead. She showed her faith by her works. It is the spirit of obedience which is well-pleasing to the Lord. He recognizes this spirit in His children even when

they may be mistaken as to the form of duty. In her case the beautiful spirit was the outcome of her trust in God.

As a sinner, she rested only on what Christ Jesus did for the pardon of her sins. His death was the ground of all her hope. She gave herself to Him because he gave Himself for her. With warm personal love for Him, she ministered in charity to those who were His. Her surrender of herself was her response to the Saviour's love.

Another feature of her character was her absolute submission to the Lord's will. Without murmur or complaint, she endured all that He saw fit to send. It is true that her life was singularly free from multiplied sorrows. The death of her husband, whom she loved devotedly, was the only great bereavement of her life, and she often spoke of how blessed she had been. All spoke well of her. Yet a life so long as hers must know many cares, anxieties, disappointments; and it is often these petty trials that weary the spirit and embitter the heart. She had her share of them; but she kept to the last her sunny temper, her cheerful disposition. She felt that everything sent to her in the way of sorrow was a means of discipline, which the Father had appointed for her training; her "light affliction, which was for a moment, working out for her a far more exceeding and eternal weight of glory." With patience and meekness she waited on God. She was very humble, and felt that God was good to her beyond her deservings. The Psalmist's expressions of humility found response in her heart. In lowliness of mind, she sought to find God in affliction, and she was willing to make

sacrifices for Him. In view of what Jesus Christ suffered for her, she esteemed no suffering too great to be borne for Him.

A special characteristic was her thankfulness. With a sweet graciousness that acknowledged every humblest service to her from those about her, she also, with profound gratitude, received everything from God's hand. She praised and adored Him for His goodness to her. The language of thankfulness was probably the most familiar to her lips. She called upon her soul "to bless the Lord, and to forget not all His benefits." She saw His hand in everything, and she rejoiced because she knew that He doeth all things well. In her last hours, she testified to His goodness. To her He was "the giver of every good and perfect gift, the Father of light." She wished her life to be an expression of her gratitude.

But the work of Christ, the gift of salvation in Him was above all else the subject of adoring thanksgiving. She felt that eternity only could make known the riches of His grace, and her heart responded to the praises which are recorded in the book of Revelation—the praises of the ransomed—"To Him that loved us and washed us from our sins in His own blood, and hath made us kings and priests unto God and His father, to Him be glory and dominion forever."

Over her thankful heart was shed the light that comes from within the veil, and in God's light she saw the light. With joy she drew water out of the wells of salvation. She took the cup of thanksgiving, and called upon the name of the Lord.

These characteristics of Mrs. Polk's religious life show why she was so even in temper, so gentle in disposition, so kind in ministry. The heart that trusts God, submits to God, and is thankful to God, has the secret of a happy life, and as age came on the light shined more and more to the perfect day. Now the "good gray head," which we all knew, is laid away to rest on a Saviour's bosom. The long life is ended, the journey is done, the tired hands folded, the weary feet are still; but they are in God's keeping, waiting the resurrection day. The time shall come when the light of God's glory shall pierce the darkness of the grave, and God's voice shall sound in the dull ear of death—the ear of his servant always ready to hear him, and this body, which we sow in weakness, shall be raised in power, and coming forth shall cry, "Oh, Death, where is thy sting, Oh, Grave, where is thy victory!" Then, with deeper joy than ever, shall she say: "Thanks be unto God, who giveth us the victory, through our Lord Jesus Christ."

Meanwhile the spirit is with God in the fullness of blessing; the twilight of evening time has been turned to the brightness of that world in which "the Lord is the light of it," just as the stars are swallowed up in the splendor of the day. She sees now as never before. Her eyes have received such anointing that no dimness shall ever shadow them again. She sees face to face, and knows as she is known. And doubtless this earth life, which her loved ones yet must live, is known by her in its meaning as never before, and with loving gaze her spirit sees the love of hearts that mourn for her, and

appreciates the kindly work of hands that ministered to her.

Let the lesson of this long life enter our hearts, and may we, too, when our journey is done, enter into the rest that remaineth for the people of God.

Thanks be unto God that she was enabled to bear witness to the truth and power of Jesus Christ, and even until the evening time He gave her light. She being dead yet speaketh.

Can I close more fittingly than with verses she treasured and which describe well the evening of her life? They are entitled

GROWING OLD GRACEFULLY.

Softly, Oh! softly, the years have swept by thee,

Touching thee lightly with tenderest care;

Sorrow and care did they often bring nigh thee;

Yet they have left thee but beauty to wear.

Growing old gracefully,

Gracefully fair.

Far from the storms that are lashing the ocean,

Nearer each day to the pleasant home light;

Far from the waves that are big with commotion,

Under full sail and the harbor in sight;

Growing old cheerfully,

Cheerful and bright.

Past all the winds that are adverse and chilling;

Past all the islands that lured thee to rest;

Past all the currents that wooed thee unwilling,

Far from the port of the land of the blest.

Growing old peacefully;

Peacefully and blest.

Never a feeling of envy and sorrow,

Where the bright faces of children are seen;

Never a year from their youth wouldst thou borrow,

Thou dost remember what lieth between.

Growing old willingly,

Gladly, I ween.

Rich in experience that angels might covet;
Rich in a faith that has grown with thy years;
Rich in a love that grew from and above it;
Soothing thy sorrows and hushing thy fears.
Growing old wealthily,
Loving and dear.
Hearts at the sound of thy coming are lightened,
Ready and willing thy hand to relieve;
Many a face at thy bright words has brightened,
"It is more blessed to give than receive."
Growing old happily,
Blest, we believe.

The choir of her own Church sang with touching pathos her favorite hymns. The body was borne to the tomb by the Elders of the Church and a few of her old friends; and there, in presence of the great multitude, with simple ceremonial, in the lawn of her own home, she was laid by the side of her husband. After the long years of waiting, they are reunited. They "know each other there."

It was Mrs. Polk's wish that the funeral should be without ostentation. Therefore the military and civil escorts tendered by the authorities were declined. The tolling bells, and the flags at half mast on the State and Federal buildings were the only public tokens of bereavement. But all hearts felt with tender regret, that a noble figure had passed out of our sight; a sweet, lovely spirit had gone from among us. Our city was the better for her living in it. May the influence of her life, the savor of her good deeds remain with us as a benediction.

WERT
BOOKBINDING
Grantville Pa
Jan Feb 1988

